



Opportunities Ahead

Keep beef at the center of consumers' plates.

by Kindra Gordon

“The beef industry won’t look like it did [before the pandemic]. It will be a new normal,” says Danette Amstein, who specializes in marketing within the meat industry as a managing principal with Midan Marketing.



Danette Amstein

But fortunately, Amstein’s forecast for a “changed” future has several optimistic tones for the beef industry as they serve consumers’ meal preferences going forward. Amstein shared her outlook during the virtual educational sessions as part of the American Hereford Association’s 2020 Annual Membership Meeting and Conference Oct. 19-24.

Changing consumers

Amstein, who grew up on a family farm in Kansas and says she and her husband both have “Hereford heritage” in their backgrounds, acknowledges that during the coronavirus pandemic, farm life for many hasn’t changed much. But, she says, “Consumers’ lives have.”

She notes, “Consumers have a lot on their minds,” and points to public health fears, economic concerns and even the social injustice issues that have plagued many urban cities for the past several months.

Interestingly, Amstein explains that historically economic concerns among consumers drive price sensitivity within their food purchases. However, Amstein says because there is also a large health crisis at hand, consumers are showing concern for food quality and health claims. As a result, she says, “One of the silver linings occurring is that consumers are eating more meat.”

Specifically, Amstein shares data by Midan tracking consumers’ meat and poultry shopping and cooking habits during the first few months of the pandemic:

53% of shoppers are buying and freezing meat and chicken much more than normal.

62% of shoppers are experimenting with new ways to cook meat and chicken.

46% of consumers are purchasing a wider variety of meat and chicken than normal, which may be prompted by availability.

54% of consumers are seeking out healthier types/cuts of meats and chicken.

44% of shoppers are cooking larger servings so that they can be used for multiple meals.

Additionally, Amstein reports that beef has remained a priority for consumers when they are dining out. According to Midan, data collected in August 2020 notes 85% of consumers regularly order meat/poultry in dishes at foodservice, 41% of consumers crave a meat/poultry dish they can’t recreate at home and 47% of consumers said beef is the protein they are most likely to order on their next foodservice trip.

Amstein calls these trends good news for the beef industry, but also underscores the importance of continuing to anticipate and prepare for marketplace changes in order to ensure beef stays at the center of consumers’ plates.

Upcoming influences

Looking ahead, Amstein encourages the beef industry to remain aware that consumers are very diverse. Regarding beef products, she notes, “It can’t be an all-for-everyone market.”

She points out that age, race and ethnicity are all influencers in consumers’ meat purchases. “Be cognizant that they may shop differently than they did in the previous generations, and that impacts what we need to offer them.”

Additionally, Amstein notes that educational efforts in teaching consumers how to cook with beef, how to use different cuts in recipes and even how to freeze and store beef are still skills consumers seek.

Along with those issues, Amstein reports concern about animal care, the environment and health for themselves and the livestock. These factors are increasingly impacting consumers’ food choices.

She explains, “It used to be cost, taste and convenience, but today’s consumers, especially millennials, have an elevated understanding of marketing ... They are looking for trust and truth and will pay more for a product with more information and transparency.” Thus, ethical considerations such as local sources, humane treatment and environmental sustainability are coming into the equation. “This is becoming a bigger piece of the food conversation than we saw a decade ago and even a year ago,” says Amstein.

Five focus areas

For the future, Amstein says Midan Marketing research suggests there are five key consumer expectation areas for the beef industry: 1) convenience, which includes everything from meal kits to online availability of meat, 2) animal welfare, 3) sustainability, 4) transparency and 5) trust.

Regarding all of these areas, Amstein believes increased communication from producers to consumers is essential. “It’s imperative that we be more transparent and show the lengths we go to take care of our animals.”

Likewise, to build trust with consumers, Amstein says, “The beef industry has got to be proactive in telling our story. And, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are some of the most important things we can do to gain consumer confidence and trust. They allow for talking directly to consumers.” She encourages producers to share what they do and why — from feeding and checking cows to baling hay.

She commends those ag producers already using social media, and says, “There are a lot of good voices out there; we just need more [producers] sharing their stories.”

Additionally, Amstein suggests that the agriculture story also needs to start being more prevalent on meat packaging and marketing materials. She points to a typical meat case at the grocery store and calls it a sea of “sameness.”

She commended the Certified Hereford Beef® (CHB) program for its beef branding efforts, saying, “CHB helps your breed tell your story and stand out.” She encourages more storytelling and branding of all beef products for the future. “It’s important to tell the story [of animal care, sustainability etc.], build trust and build loyalty. All of that leads to increased product value,” Amstein concludes. **HW**

One thing

What is the most important thing producers can do to help the future of the beef industry? Danette Amstein suggests it is posting an ag video on social media once a week. “Explain why you feed, doctor cattle or rotate pastures,” she says. “The more you can share, the more quickly we can gain trust and transparency for the Hereford breed and the beef industry.” **HW**